

How To Conduct A Public Meeting



A Few Simple Rules of Correct
Procedure at Meetings of an
Organized Local, or any Public
Meeting, for the Guidance of
Presiding Officers and Members.

PRICE TEN CENTS.

ORDER OF BUSINESS.

The following shall be the order of business of meetings of the Association:

- 1—Reading minutes of previous meeting.
- 2—Address and report of officers.
- 3—Reports of committees.
- 4—Unfinished business.
- 5—New business.
- 6—Addresses and discussions.
- 7—Opening of question drawer.
- 8—Election of officers.
- 9—Adjournment.

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The Conduct of a Public Meeting

By E. Cora Hind

The orderly conduct of a public meeting is a matter of increasing importance as duties multiply and time is precious. A good deal of cheap wit has been expended on women's meetings and the fact that they are not conducted according to parliamentary usages, but a long experience of public meetings of both men and women has convinced me that in this particular there is comparatively little to choose between them, and that when women give themselves to the matter their ordinary meetings are really more orderly and precise than those of men. Order was heaven's first law and this gives us the key note of the value of order. It saves time, and prevents friction. It also gives dignity and grace to the proceedings, and as the Canadian standard for the conduct of public meetings, namely "Bourinet's Procedure of Public Meetings," is to be found in every library, there is little or no excuse for any official not being posted on the proper method of conducting any portion of the business of an ordinary meeting. Of course special Societies will have peculiarities of constitution and even of proceedings, and what I have to say is based on the broad principle of an orderly public gathering, and before taking up the actual conduct of a meeting, I would like to make a few general remarks on the duties of officers and how these bear upon the orderly conduct of the meeting

The Presiding Officer.

The duty of the person in the chair, no matter what the name of the office may be, is to preside, to maintain order, to make decisions as to points of order and to give a casting vote in an election. The presiding officer, or as we shall say for convenience, the President of the Meeting, should never under any circumstances speak to a motion while occupying the chair. Unless it is expressly forbidden in the Constitution, there is no objection to the presiding officer expressing an opinion, but before doing so the chair should be vacated in favor of the vice-president, or whoever would act in the absence of the President. This is a very important matter, more so than many people realize. Many meetings are unduly influenced by expressions of opinion from the chair, and these are wholly out of order. Any member of an organization who wishes to draw attention to the president violating this rule, should rise, and addressing the chair, say, "I rise to a point of order," and it will be a very obtuse president indeed who will not immediately acknowledge the mistake, and either cease to discuss the matter, or vacate the chair in favor of some one else while so doing. The presiding officer should however, avoid the discussion of any subject, and the more strictly the presiding officer adheres to this rule, the better it will be for the meeting. I think there is no doubt that women presiding officers are more prone to this error than are men, probably from the reason that the members of women's organizations are either too lax or too timid to check up the presiding officer who is guilty of this breach of rules. When it becomes necessary for a presiding officer to give a decision, it should be done by saying, "The Chair rules so and so." Excepting in very extreme cases, a ruling of the chair

should be accepted by the meeting without question. If a member is not satisfied with the decision he should rise and say, "I appeal from the decision of the chair." The speaker will then put the question, which is undebatable, by first giving the terms of his decision, and the point of appeal, and add, "The question is now, shall the decision of the chair stand as the judgment of the house? Those who are in favor of the motion will say "Aye." Then when the voices have been given for the "ayes," he will say, "Those who are against the motion will say 'no'." If the voices are doubtful and the names are demanded by five members, he will again submit the question and the roll will be called in accordance with usage. It may be added that when the speaker is on his feet every member should sit down until the former concludes what he has to say on the point of order.

Duties of Secretaries.

The majority of Societies have a corresponding and a recording secretary. One of the special functions of the recording secretary is to supply the presiding officer with a clearly expressed order of business for each meeting. If there is a special formula for any given society, that should be followed, but I shall only attempt to give a general outline of the order of business.

First, the reading of the minutes of the previous meeting. This is, of course, assuming that the meeting has to do with a body which meets at regular intervals. The members present should listen attentively to the minutes. Those who were present at the previous meeting should be in a position to check the Secretary's Report and this should be done after the minutes are read. As soon as the

minutes are read, the presiding officer should ask if there are any corrections or additions to be made in the minutes. If anyone has a correction to make, they should be ready and make it as briefly as possible. If this correction is sustained by the majority of those present at the previous meeting, the minutes should at once be amended in this respect. When these corrections have been made, it is in order for anyone to move the adoption of the minutes as read if there are no corrections, or as corrected if there have been corrections made. The motion to adopt the minutes should be seconded and put to the meeting, the yeas and nays called for, and when the minutes are duly passed, they should at once be signed by the presiding officer. If there is any business arising out of the minutes of the previous meeting, it should be taken up immediately following the adoption of the minutes, unless by a majority vote it is postponed to a later period of the meeting.

Order of Business.

As soon as the minutes are disposed of, communications are read, and following them the reports of Standing Committees should be received, adopted, laid on the table, or referred back to the committee as the meeting may see fit. It is in order for the convener making the report of a standing committee to move the adoption of that report. This should be seconded and the report discussed. If it is not thought well to adopt the committee's report, it will be in order for any member to move, "by way of amendment," that the report be laid on the table, or that it be returned to the committee. Let me say here that in the case of a report being laid on the table, by a majority vote of the meeting, it cannot be discussed or taken up again without a formal motion.

moved and seconded and carried by the meeting that "the report be taken from the table."

Following the reports of the standing committees should come the reports of Special Committees and these reports should be dealt with in the same way.

When the old business arising out of the minutes of the previous meeting, and the reports of committees have been disposed of, the next order of business should be motions of which notice has been given. A member may have given notice that at this meeting a motion will be brought in dealing with a certain matter. It is not necessary for a notice of motion to be seconded, but when the president calls for motions of which notice has been given, the member having given notice of motion should be prepared with the motion written out, and this motion should be read by the member giving it, who at the same time will state who is the seconder. The motion having been moved and seconded, it is in order to be discussed, the mover of the motion leading the discussion, and if any member wishes to move an amendment it will be in order to do so. I find that quite a number of women are under the impression that when a notice of motion has been given, and the motion is brought in, that it is not subject to amendment. This is quite wrong. The idea of the giving of a notice of motion is that the members, knowing that a motion along certain lines will be brought up at a given time, have an opportunity of thinking over and preparing any amendments which they may wish to make to it. Any motion, excepting the motion to adjourn, may have an amendment, and an amendment to the amendment, and here it is well to note the form in which motions are put in Canada. When there is an

amendment to the amendment, the amendment to the amendment is put first, that is to say, the opinion of the meeting is taken first on the amendment to the amendment, then on the amendment, and finally on the main motion.

Amendments.

This question of amendment is so full of pitfalls, and at the same time so simple, that I will give you Bourinet's statement undiluted:

"When there are a main motion, an amendment, and an amendment thereto, the speaker will submit the three motions in the reverse of the order in which they are made, and first take the sense of the house on the last amendment: "Is it the pleasure of the house to adopt the amendment to the amendment?" If this second amendment is rejected, it is regular to move another (provided, of course, it is different in purport from the one already negatived) as soon as the speaker has again proposed the question: "Is it the pleasure of the house to adopt the amendment to the main motion (or original question)?"

Only two amendments can be proposed at the same time to a question. In other words, there can only be three questions at one time before the house: the main motion, an amendment, and an amendment thereto. But the motion for the adjournment of the house or of the debate is always in order under such circumstances.

When a proposition or question before the house consists of several sections, paragraphs, or resolutions, the order of considering and amending it is to begin at the commencement and to proceed through it in course by paragraphs; and when a latter part has been

amended, it is not in order to recur back, and make any amendment or alteration of a former part.

Sometimes it may be necessary to refer to a previous paragraph incidentally for the purpose of explanation or illustrating an argument on the second paragraph, but a continuance of the former discussion would be out of order.

If an amendment be resolved in the affirmative it will not be competent to move that it be struck out, in whole or in part.

Amendments may, however, be proposed to add words to the main motion, or amendment as amended.

No addition can be made to a question after the house has decided that the words proposed to be left out should stand part of the question.

Closing the Debate.

When a discussion has been carried on for some time on a question, it is the duty of the chair to close the debate, and this should be done by putting the question to the voice of the meeting, and getting an opinion as to whether the "yeas" or "nays" have it. Every member has a right to speak to any motion which is before the house, but a good presiding officer will make it very clear that no one shall speak a second time to any motion before the house until all members who wish to discuss the question have had an opportunity of doing so. This is a point where very many presiding officers fail, and it leads to endless trouble and confusion. The presiding officer should, if a member rises to speak a second time on the same question, gently but firmly point out

that until all have had an opportunity of speaking, no member can speak a second time. This is excellent training for the members, as they will very speedily get into the habit of putting all their thoughts together and saying all they have to say on a question the first time they rise to their feet. Another point which the presiding officer should look after carefully, is to see that the debate is relevant to the question, and it should be borne in mind that no one can interrupt a speaker except with his own consent, or by rising to a question of order, which must be clearly stated and decided by the chair.

In the matter of amendments and amendments to the amendments, it must always be borne in mind that amendments must be relevant to a motion or question. If they are on the same subject matter as the original motion they are admissible. The remembrance of this simple rule would save a very great deal of confusion. To take a concrete example I have known to occur frequently:—Supposing Mrs. Jones has moved that the meeting pay \$100 to any specific object. Mrs. Smith who does not approve of this, will immediately bob up and move that the meeting do not pay the \$100. This is not an admissible amendment.

Having disposed of motions of which notice has been given, it will be in order for the chair to call for new business, but new business can never be introduced until all previously discussed or planned business has been disposed of. Of course it is hardly necessary to say that the chair should always be definitely addressed, and that no member, after having addressed the chair as "Madam President" or whatever the form may be, should go on speaking until having been definitely recognized by the chair.

Recognition by the Chair.

It is one of the special duties of the presiding officer to keep eyes on all parts of the meeting and be quick to recognize speakers in the order in which they rise. This is a very important part of the duties of a presiding officer. It is quite a common thing to see someone who is perhaps in a more remote part of the room, rise time after time and fail to secure the recognition of the chair. Where a member has expressed a desire to speak a second time to a motion, it is in order for the presiding officer, after the discussion has continued for some time, to say, "If all members present who wish to speak to this motion have spoken, we will give three or five minutes, as the case may be, to those who wish to speak a second time." When the president makes this announcement, it will be in order for any member who has not yet spoken, and who wishes to do so, to rise to her feet, address the chair, and after she is recognized, to speak to the motion. Very much time would be saved if members would make up their minds at once whether they do or do not wish to speak upon a question. It is no uncommon thing to have an awful pause, and then, when the question is called for, have half a dozen members on their feet at once wanting to speak to it. When once the house has decided, by the method of yeas and nays, that the question before the house has been sufficiently discussed, the discussion cannot be re-opened.

While all motions of importance should come before a meeting by notice given at a previous meeting, a motion may be made even on an important matter by unanimous consent of the members, but it must be borne in mind that it must be absolutely unanimous—every member must vote. A motion must never be discussed

unless it has been duly seconded. When a motion has been proposed and seconded, it cannot be withdrawn without the consent of the meeting or members, or, as the common phrase is, "by leave of the House." In order to obtain this leave, there must be no negative voice. A single negative vote is sufficient to prevent the withdrawal of the motion. When a special meeting is called, the business for which it is called must be definitely stated in the call, and no other business can come before that special meeting.

The motion to adjourn is always in order, requires no seconder, cannot be discussed, nor can it be amended.

When a motion has been put and carried, it cannot be rescinded until a motion has been made to read the entry in the journals and the resolution, and when that has been done by the secretary there must be a motion that the said resolution be rescinded, or another resolution expressing a different opinion can be agreed to. It is not customary to rescind a motion at the same meeting at which it has been passed.

This is a very brief outline of some of the questions which come up more generally in public meetings, and I think the simple rule of having an order of business and adhering strictly to it, would save very much of the confusion which arises in meetings, and would prevent much waste of time.

CHANGE OF RULES.

All societies of any permanency work under a constitution and by-laws which provide for the conduct of meetings and it is highly important that these rules be adhered to strictly.

I would like to give you Bourinet's views on this subject:

"All such rules, regulations, and by-laws are left necessarily to be modified, amended or changed by these bodies themselves. As long as they remain in force, and are not in direct conflict with statutory enactment or in excess of the powers given by law, they must regulate the proceedings of the bodies that have passed them. They cannot be changed or altered except in accordance with the methods laid down in the regulations or the law, and every violation of them may be prevented by any member asking the intervention of the chair under the rules.

"Suspension of rules is not to be encouraged. At times, it may be necessary and convenient to suspend rules by unanimous consent, but this should rarely be permitted even in the society of the most humble object, and never, except in cases of urgency or routine business, in municipal or other bodies, regulated by law and immediately dealing with the rights and interests of individuals. Every assembly having legislative and large responsibilities, should have a rule of prohibiting a change of any fundamental rule, or by-law, except after exact notices of the proposed amendment. In the case of bodies having corporate existence and dealing with the pecuniary and other important interests of individuals, no important amendment should be made except after such special notice, and with the consent of a certain majority—generally two-thirds—of all members of the company or body. In addition, the rules or by-laws of all municipal councils, conferences, synods and other important associations, shall have a rule of referring in all cases, not provided for expressly in those rules and by-laws, to the

common law of parliament; and that is to say, to the rules and practice of the House of Commons of Canada."

I have from time to time been asked a number of questions as to duties and privileges of officers, etc., and perhaps one of the most frequently asked is: "Is it the duty of a presiding officer to attend committee meetings?" Most emphatically it is not. A presiding officer, Regent, or President as the case may be, is, ex officio, a member of all committees. That means a member by virtue of office only and without powers. It is generally considered bad form for the presiding officer of an organization to attend a committee meeting unless specially asked to do so by the convenor of that committee.

Presiding officers should and generally do prefer to know nothing of the deliberations of a committee so that when the committee's report comes before the full meeting they may regard it wholly from an impersonal standpoint.

**A few Simple Rules of Correct Procedure at
Meetings of an Organized Local, or any
Public Meeting, for the Guidance of
Presiding Officers and Members.**

Every deliberative body must for the proper carrying on of its meetings subscribe to a code of rules of procedure for the guidance of its members. The United Farmers of Alberta subscribes to the well established rules of British Parliamentary practice.

The principal rules of procedure are covered in the Constitution and By-Laws of the Association, and these should be studied by each

member. No person is prepared to take his place as a responsible member in the councils of the people who has not a fair knowledge of the rules of procedure and debate in deliberative bodies. Every member of the U.F.A.—man or woman—should have this knowledge, should learn to express himself in meetings and how to conduct himself in public gatherings.

1. Every meeting must have a chairman or presiding officer whose ruling must be obeyed unless the meeting by majority vote rules otherwise. If neither president or vice-president are present the meeting elects a chairman (pro tem) for the meeting.

2. Five members present at any regular or properly called meeting of a Local form a quorum and have power to do business. A majority of the Board forms a quorum.

3. The presiding officer may not vote on any question except in case of a tie, when he may, if he sees fit, cast a deciding vote.

4. The presiding officer may not debate any question before the assembly but may make explanations or statements of fact relative thereto. He may give the chair to another and then have the privileges of a member on the floor, resuming the chair when he has finished speaking.

5. A member wishing to speak must rise and address the chairman by his title. He may not speak until he has been recognized by the chair. Thus:

Mr. Jones rising exclaims, "Mr. President." The president replies "Mr. Jones has the floor." Then and only then Mr. Jones proceeds to speak.

6. Every member has a right to be heard on every debatable subject brought before the meeting but must confine his remarks to the matter in hand. He may not address or name another member in debate nor may he use terms or make statements which are offensive or ill-mannered.

7. Business is introduced by a member making a motion or moving a resolution. Every important or lengthy resolution should be handed to the Secretary in writing.

8. When the minutes of the previous meeting have been read by the Secretary the chairman asks, "Are there any errors or omissions?" If not a motion to approve same is in order. If corrections are made the motion "to approve the minutes as amended" is made. Both the President and the Secretary should place their signatures beneath the approved minutes of each meeting.

9. Nearly all motions require to be seconded and none of these may be debated even by the mover until it has been seconded and the chairman has put the matter before the meeting by saying, "Are you ready for the question?" Then the mover and seconder get first chance to speak.

A nomination or a Call to Order requires no seconder.

10. Many motions may not be amended, others cannot be debated but must be voted on without arguments. (See 15).

11. When a motion has once been put, no other motion may be introduced until this has been disposed of (to this rule there are some exceptions, see 17) but it may be amended without altering its main purpose. An amend-

ment to the motion may also be amended, but an amendment to the amendment cannot be amended. (See 16).

Amendments may be made in three ways:
(a) By striking out a part. (b) By adding a part. (c) By substituting a part.

12. The amendment to the amendment is first voted on. If this is defeated the amendment is put. If it is carried, the amendment as amended is put. If this amendment carries, the motion as amended is put; if not, the original motion is put, unless further and different amendments are proposed.

13. No member may speak while another member has the floor, or while a vote is being taken, except to ask a question or raise a point of order or privilege, or to request information.

14. No one not a member may take part in any business meeting except by a vote of the members present, and in no event may non-members vote on matters of business.

15. Motions that may not be debated:

- (a) To adjourn.
- (b) Call to order.
- (c) Motion that ——— do lie on the table.
- (d) Motion to take from the table.

16. Motions that cannot be amended:

- (a) Motion to adjourn.
- (b) Motion to amend an amendment.
- (c) Call to order.
- (d) Motion that ——— do lie on the table.
- (e) Question whether subject shall be discussed.
- (f) Motion to suspend rules.

17. The following motions may be put while other business is before the meeting:

(See 11 and 13).

- (a) To amend.
- (b) That ——— do lie on the table.
- (c) Motion to proceed to "Order of the Day"—regular business.
- (d) To adjourn.

18. Committees may be appointed by nomination and election or, if the meeting so desires, by the president. The one first named on the list is Convenor, who will call the first meeting of the committee. It is usual for the committee on first convening to elect a chairman from its number. Committees are governed by the same rules as the body appointing them, and are called together by the chairman.

19. Reports of committees should always be in writing. Minority reports may be read by the Secretary by courtesy of the President.

20. The meeting may "receive" the report of a committee without binding the Association to the matter of the report. If the meeting "adopts" the report it becomes in its entirety the will of the whole body.

21. Once a matter has been decided by a vote, no new resolution involving the same matter can be dealt with without a motion "That (naming the resolution in question) be reconsidered." If this carries, then the same or a similar resolution may be introduced.

22. Voting, when not by ballot, is usually taken by the raising of the right hand.

23. When nominations have been called for in the election of an officer or a committee and when in the opinion of a member sufficient nominations have been made, he may "Move that nominations close."

24. Before putting any motion to vote, the chairman must say: "You have heard the motion; are you ready for the question?" If further debate is not desired, members may call "Question!" Then the chairman says, "All in favor signify in the usual manner." Then "Contrary, if any." He must then say, either—"I declare the motion carried" or "I declare the motion (or amendment) lost."

25. If a resolution is before the meeting which the meeting does not wish to vote on at the time nor to debate further, a member may "Move that the resolution do lie on the table." If this carries, the resolution cannot come up again, unless a motion "That ——— be taken from the table" has carried.

26. Unless otherwise explicitly provided, a proposition carries by a majority of the votes actually cast, be the vote ever so small.

27. The presiding officer should insist on order when a member is speaking, and very especially so when a visiting speaker is addressing the meeting.

If a vote of thanks is proposed to any one the proper form is for a member to move "That a vote of thanks be extended to Mr. Blank for his splendid address, etc." Someone seconds, and the President puts the motion. When the vote has been taken by standing, clapping of hands or otherwise, the chairman says: "Mr. Blank, I have much pleasure in tendering you the thanks of this meeting for etc., etc." Mr. Blank will probably rise and bow to the audience or make a few graceful remarks.

28. In recording minutes the Secretary should state first the date and place. If the meeting is a special meeting, the purpose for which it was called should be recorded. All motions dealt with, and whether carried or lost, must be recorded fully.

(A synopsis of the discussion may be recorded and important communications may also be copied in the minutes if desired).

29. The principal duties of the President or presiding officer:

(a) To open the sitting at the proper time by taking the chair and calling the members to order;

(b) To announce the business before the assembly in the order in which it is to be acted upon;

(c) To receive and submit in the proper manner all motions and propositions presented by the members;

(d) To put to vote all questions which are regularly moved or necessarily arise in the course of the proceedings and to announce the result;

(e) To restrain the members, when engaged in debate, within the rules of order;

(f) To enforce on all occasions the observance of order and decorum among the members;

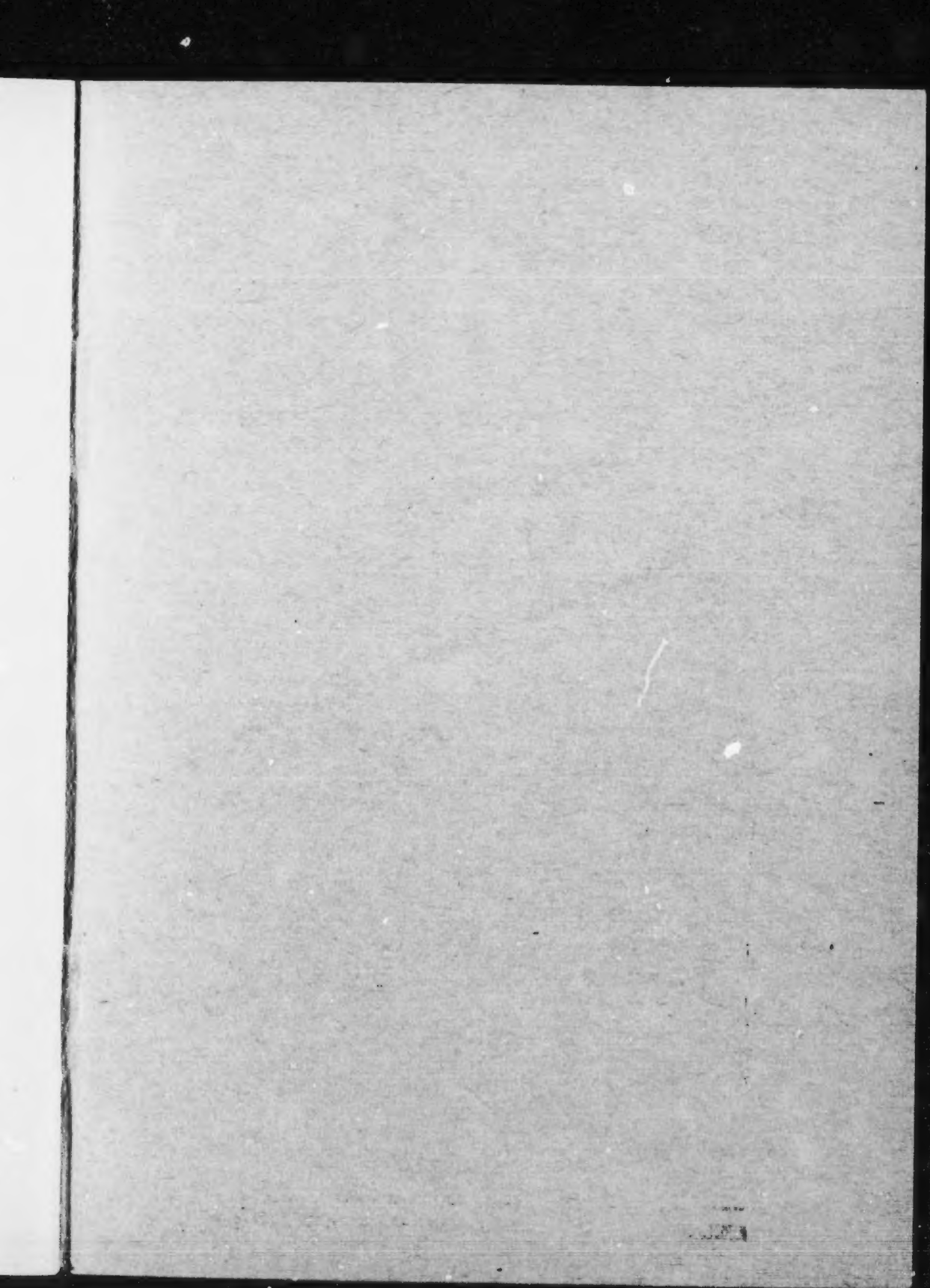
(g) To receive all messages and other communications and announce them to the assembly;

(h) To authenticate by his signature, when necessary, all the acts, orders and proceedings of the assembly;

(i) To inform the assembly, when necessary, or when referred to for the purpose, in a point of order or practice;

(j) To name the members (when directed to do so in a particular case, or when it is made a part of his general duty by a rule) who are to serve on committees; and, in general:

(k) In all things to obey implicitly the commands of the assembly.



The United Farmers of Alberta, organized in 1909, in 1919 had a membership of 25,647.

The United Farm Women of Alberta, organized in 1915, in 1919 had a membership of 3,137.

The first Junior Branch was organized in 1919. Eighteen branches were organized before the close of the year, and twenty in the first four months of 1920.

The United Grain Growers Ltd., which was formed by the amalgamation of The Alberta Farmers' Co-operative Elevator Company and the Grain Growers' Grain Company, now has 150 elevators in Alberta. The Farmers' Co-operative elevators in Alberta grew out of the U.F.A.

The Grain Growers' Guide, the official organ of The United Farmers of Alberta, was established in 1908 and now has a circulation in the three prairie provinces of 80,000 weekly.

The Canadian Council of Agriculture is the Dominion-wide Farmers' Organization and is composed of representatives of the U.F.A., U.G.C., and farmers' educational and co-operative organizations in other provinces. It represents upwards of 150,000 organized farmers in the Dominion.
